

The timing of voting on applications to the Commission

In Opinions 1861, 1866 and 1867 published in the present issue of the *Bulletin* it is noted that Commissioner Dupuis abstained from voting on the ground that less than a year had elapsed between publication of the last comment on each of the applications and the case being sent for voting; Professor Dupuis has asked that his reason for abstention be recorded. Had such an interval been implemented none of these Opinions could have been published before March 1998, and it may be helpful to readers if I explain the procedure which has long been adopted in determining when published applications are submitted to Commissioners for voting.

As stated on the first page of every issue of the *Bulletin* 'the Commission is authorised to vote on applications published in the *Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature* six months after their publication but this period is normally extended to enable comments to be submitted'. A balance has to be struck between haste preventing a considered response by zoologists to applications (or to comments on them) and, on the other hand, undue delay, which not only causes uncertainty but also can exacerbate existing nomenclatural problems.

In practice the shortest period between publication of an application and sending it to the Commission for voting is eight months, but such an interval only applies if the case appears straightforward and most unlikely to meet with any contrary view. Two intrinsic safeguards always lengthen the effective period for receipt of comments. The first safeguard is that the voting procedure lasts three months, and the second is that the Opinion incorporating the Commission's ruling is not committed for publication in the *Bulletin* until more than two months after completion of voting. Thus a decision is never finalised until more than 13 months after the publication of even the most simple case. If, contrary to expectations, a comment from a zoologist which raises a substantial issue were to be received within the voting period or in the following two months it would be published, a ruling would be postponed and the application would be reconsidered by the Commission. However, no instance of this being necessary has occurred in at least the past ten years.

Complex applications, and in particular those where opposing comments have been received or are anticipated, are not submitted for voting as rapidly as given above. Comments (which sometimes include alternative proposals) are published in the *Bulletin*, and the Commission is asked to vote on the applications only after a period adequate for zoologists to make further responses for publication. The period between publication of a 'comment' and the start of the voting procedure depends on the nature of the comment and of previous ones (if any), and whether further discussion is expected; it would not be reasonable for simple statements of support to delay a vote. If any comments are received too late for publication they are reported to the Commission on the voting papers if this is possible, and they are always mentioned in the Opinion on the case. In every instance the safeguards described above apply: substantive comments received within the voting period and a further two months would lead to postponement of the Opinion and reconsideration by the Commission if this were appropriate.

Debate is never stifled, and in cases where a diversity of view is apparent the application (and alternative proposals, if any have been put forward) is not submitted for voting until it appears very probable that the flow of comments has ended.

During its meetings in Budapest in August 1996 the Commission considered whether the established procedure which is outlined above gave sufficient time for consideration of applications and comments. Recognising that the zoological community has a right to expect reasonably speedy consideration of applications once published, it was agreed that the practice described in this note was adequate to ensure that rulings were given in the light of all the evidence likely to become available and that further delays of arbitrary length would not be justified.

P.K. TUBBS

Executive Secretary